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ABSTRACT

This article is one of a series presented at workshops focusing on the development of social work curriculum relevant to the minority community and minority group experiences. Briefly commenting upon the nature of the changing times, the author notes the two major social problems of racism and poverty, emphasizing the importance of the need for social work education to understand the parameters of ethnic differences. Further, curriculum needs to be reassessed to embody these differences. In addition to four stated major objectives of social work education curriculum there are six functions of content and learnings vis-a-vis ethnicity and racism. Social work education curriculum needs to incorporate into the curriculum content which: 1) provides accurate information about the historical developments and social contributions of racial minorities; 2) prepares the student for useful service in minority communities; 3) assists students in overcoming racists attitudes by imparting new knowledge and new values; 4) affords an objective analysis and understanding of the issues in order to help achieve cooperation between the races; 5) helps minority students develop a sense of pride, awareness, and confidence which is psychologically uplifting; and 6) serves as a means of developing new ideological orientations, to develop new theories and strategies for changing societies. A related document is SO 005 800. (SJM)

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AN OCCASIONAL PAPER

OF THE

CONSORTIUM OF TEXAS SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION FOR ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS IN TEXAS

A CHALLENGE TO SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: INCLUSION OF CONTENT ON ETHNIC AND RACIAL MINORITIES IN THE CURRICULUM

by

Mary Ella Robertson, D.S.W.

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Prepared for presentation at

"The Relevancy of Black and Chicano Content:

Rationale, Rhyme, and Reason" Workshop

Houston, Texas

April 13th and 14th

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Supported by National Institute of Mental Health Grant #12439-02

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PREFACE

The lack of representation of minority group members in social work education and the profession has been a salient issue in recent years. In an attempt to deal significantly with this question a meeting was held in December 1968, in Austin, Texas chaired by Dr. Milton Wittman, Chief of the Social Work Training Branch of the National Institute of Mental Health. Sponsored by the School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin and the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, this meeting was the primary impetus behind the creation of a Consortium of the Texas schools of social work and the project which they designed, "Social Work Education for Economically Disadvantaged Groups in Texas."

The projects main focus has been the recruitment and retention of economically disadvantaged students, including minority groups; the development of a statewide recruitment structure that will insure the participation of minority group members in social work education beyond the life of the project; and the development of social work curriculum relevant to the minority community and minority group experiences.

In order to achieve the third goal of this project, a series of workshops on "Minority Group Content and the Enrichment of Social Work Curriculum" were held in the four graduate schools of social work in Texas. These workshops highlighted many critical problems and issues involved in infusing ethnic minority content into the curriculum of schools of social work. The articles in this series were presented at the workshops which were held in each consortium school.

Thanks are due to the deans, coordinators, and curriculum committees who assisted in organizing the workshops. Acknowledgement is made to the National Institute of Mental Health whose grant is supporting the Consortium Project. Special appreciation is also expressed to the Advisory Board of the Consortium Project whose suggestion and support helped in the planning and development of the series of workshops.

August 1972

Juan Armendáriz
Project Director
School of Social Work
University of Texas
at Austin

Today, we are educating people to live and work in societies in constant change, frequently in crisis. As Margaret Mead observed, "no one will live all of his life in the world into which he was born, and no one will die in the world in which he worked in his maturity." Our times are marked by daring and extraordinary scientific and technological discoveries. Simultaneously, we live in a time of almost unprecedented social revolution. The present situation was made possible by the interaction of a number of forces, and noteworthy among them a greater understanding and acceptance of man as initiator in social processes, not simply a reactor or a passive particle in the grip of social forces. Man can control, shape, and predict his destiney. New attitudes towards human dignity have emerged, and it is deemed essential to extend the boundaries of freedom of personal choice from the beginning of an individual's life, to enable him to make the most of his life, and to enrich the national heritage which is the responsibility of each generation. Basic assumptions about the nature of man and his relationships to social institutions are being confronted, and alienated out - groups - racial minorities - are no longer willing to accept their subjugation. Freedom is the choice to perceive and define a situation in one's own terms, according to his standards and his reference groups' own values, and to act on the basis of that definition. Racial minorities reject the essence of racism - they no longer accept race as a relevant criterion for decision or to determine the conditions under which they should be granted equality. The majority can no longer decide his rights.[1]

If on the other hand, there is the stirring, activist thrust on the part of racial minorities toward human dignity, self definition, and assertion of minority group integrity, on the other

hand, there is the tenacity of racism and prejudice which characterizes our country. White supremacy has defined white America's relations with people of color. Racism is integral to the United States' foreign and domestic policy in the present and in the past. The nation finds itself increasingly in global predicaments because the white supremacy of the past has contributed to the arrogance of the present.[2] The country has held white supremacy as a dominant theme. In its basic political document, it defined the Black person as three fifths of a man, created a dehumanizing and destructive chattel slavery system, and ultimately almost destroyed the American Indian population.[3] Skin color became the measure of a man. Stereotyping of non-whites stamped them with negative identities and worthlessness. Invalid correlations were made between physical features, and spiritual, intellectual, and social capacities. While the new Calvinism purports that whiteness connotes superiority, blackness, browness, etc., connote inferiority, exclusions, being <u>evil</u> and limited in humaneness.

While the quest for human dignity is not new in the long story of human existence, it has reached a level of conscious concern which is the hallmark of our time. While we fumble ineptly, make compromises and temporize, and are weak-willed in critical situations, it is an admirable fact that deliberate attempts have been made to struggle against inequalities, against loneliness and separateness, and against the waste of mind and spirit. The struggle for human dignity is a struggle for the right to stand, with other people, as an equal, and to have confidence that one has worth as a person.[4]

Within the present social context, our own profession has defined the two major social problems of our times as racism and poverty, and has designated the major portion of its resources to be directed towards the amelioration of these two problems. The accrediting body of social work education has adopted a standard that directs schools of social work to conduct the entire program without discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, ethnic origin or sex. In certain aspects of social work, practice as well as education, we have been deeply influenced by the belief in the rhetoric of pluralism, without taking into account that in reality, there is a basic strain towards conformity, towards standard life styles and values. We have underestimated and underrated heterogeneity, variability, and difference. It has become mandatory to examine differences in all of their ramifications - ethnic, racial, social class, etc., avoiding the inclination to condemn or condone, to denigrate or romanticize, as they interfere with accurate description and interpretation. The significance of difference (not superiority - inferiority), the basis for them and the organization of these differences and the collective life around them becomes focal points of our concerns.

It is relatively easy to discuss difference in terms of ethnicity; for most times these terms connotes difference among white groups. While there may be some bias, as suchwas the case against European immigrants at the turn of the century, it was possible for ethnically (nationally & culturally[5]) differentiated people to achieve and strive towards fulfillment, as they were white and never subjected, one generation after another, to the massive oppression and exclusion from opportunity as were non-whites.

Therefore, in social work education, it would seem that our task, as was stated above, is to understand the parameters of difference. However, a more compelling obligation is to recognize, analytically understand, and make a total commitment to abolishing racism.

This term is a jarring word. It is unsettling, raises anxieties, fears, and guilt. Yet, it is an every constant fact of life that prevents many from achieving human dignity. It is institutional, behavioral, attitudinal, pervasive, and dysfunctional.

The hurdles of racial equality are high, and extraordinary preparations must be made for the leap. The most direct mode of offsetting some of the problems posed may reside in programs of learning. Increased knowledge concerning persons of other races would be helpful in breaking down stereotypes, and should form a basis for a humanistic profession such as social work to envolve strategies and plans of action to reverse its dehumanizing effects.

In order to prepare social work students for the tasks that lie ahead, educators are constantly reappraising curriculum, educational policies, and practices; for the curriculum is a major key to organized exchanges between faculty and students as they strive to master an understanding of man and his changing environment,. In reassessing curriculum, the educator is guided by the need to:

1. Help the student develop intellectual and moral integrity, an ability to think independently and critically about problems of society and to recognize and accept personal responsibility for value judgments.
2. Provide basis for the student to understand and express fundamental values and philosophies that form the foundation of our social institutions' policies and practice.

3. Prepare the student, through understanding, to act among all people, an ability that often requires a major change in outlook and attitude.
4. Guide the student to cultivate the character and intellectual resourcefulness which will enable them to live with uncertainty and effect change.

Given these broad objectives of a social work education curriculum, they can be further specified by determining what is the function of content and learnings vis' a vis' ethnicity and racism. These functions or purposes can be divided into six major categories.[6] Selective content can then be included, as it is related to each purpose. The functions are:

1. Gap Filling Function. Some educational content is built into the curriculums particularly from the humanities and social sciences, which provide accurate information about the historical developments and societal contributions of racial minorities who have been practically omitted from the curriculum in undergraduate education. The knowledge base of the student is expanded so that he acquires a new set of positive facts about the "invisible men" of our nation. The Human Growth and Social Environment Sequence can be considerably revised to serve the gap filling function, with content around subject matter such as cultural perspectives on minority group communities, black and chicano family patterns, the distorting effect of racism upon personality development, and positive coping mechanisms used by minorities to survive. Major emphasis should be placed upon becoming aware of and analyzing stereotypes,

misconceptions, and myths about minorities. Perhaps inadvertently, social work has joined with other social scientists in promoting stereotyping such as those made about fatherless families. Authentic, comprehensive and detailed information about the life style and values of any group is absolutely necessary if the student is to be prepared to combat myths and stereotypes.

Because most students come to a school of social work knowing nothing about racial minorities' history in the U.S., some schools have prepared content in subject matter such as Afro-American history. Such courses provide a necessary perspective for all students, although the content is sometimes difficult for the student to encompass affectively. For the first time they become aware of the fact that even a great American like Thomas Jefferson was a slaveholder all of his life, and that despite repeated attempts by the Black astronomer Banneker to get Jefferson to serve as a model for his countrymen and renounce the institution of slavery, he never did. Thus, as students become immersed in Afro-American history, they find it psychologically hazardous, for many of their models are called into question. Once they grow beyond this initial reaction, they move with confidence and appreciation into the study of Afro-American History, and find it useful in re-evaluating their attitudes and interpersonal relations. The introduction of historical content about racial minority groups would have the same gap filling effect, for a sure way to get to know and appreciate a people is through a study of their history, literature, art, folkways and tradition.

2. The Task Oriented Function. To serve this purpose, content is introduced into the curriculum to prepare the student for useful service in minority communities. Community organization, minority economics and politics, analysis of social policy and service delivery systems, and the role of the social workers as a change agent are emphasized.

Mary Richmond's significant effort in the professionalization of social work and her development of techniques of data collection and their utilization to individualize the client did much to set the stage for the monumental impact of Freud's theories on social casework. Although we have been concerned for sometime with expanding the theoretical base of social work casework to include other concepts, Freudian thought and ego psychology still have a great impact upon casework practice. As casework has become more clinical, developed more assumptions about client readiness and treatability, it has become less effective with blacks and other ethnic minorities who, as a prerequisite for service, had to be socialized to work as the agency wanted. For example, it was necessary for him to keep appointments punctually, and to be articulate. To the extent that he learned to be a client, he could expect to receive service; otherwise he was designated as untreatable or unmotivated. The focus of practice, as seen by ethnic minorities, has been upon getting them to accommodate themselves to societal expectations and to their low status, while they remained abused, exploited, and self-blaming for their condition, ashamed of their person and their past. The repression,

dependency, and pseudo-helplessness that ethnic minorities have felt has not been alleviated by professional social work. It is for this reason that the community organization worker is more popular with ethnic groups. He is perceived as a professional who is interested in changing social structure and social conditions. There is an urgent need for educators to determine how to make the casework method more effective in developing the personhood of ethnic minorities.

Rejection by others is about as devastating an experience as a human being can encounter, and it is especially destructive when such rejection becomes chronic or categorical because of ethnic origin or the color of his skin. Such distortions cannot be contained within the private life of an individual person. We have seen how they release tensions that soon spread beyond the psychological boundaries of interpersonal relations to the larger dimensions of the nation.[7] If we value individuals it is in order that the practice sequence direct the student to re-examine basic assumptions and principles in respect to social work's responsibility in making human fulfillment possible for all. Many ethnic and racial minority-group members envision their freedom and the development of their personhood in societal change. Regardless of the method learned, present-day practice requires that the social work student attain knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will enable him to affect structural changes in the social system.

It has been suggested that the practice sequence be expanded to include new ways of forming helping contracts with inner-city clients, to take into consideration the effects of culture and race upon treatment planning and methods, to utilize new strategies for working with clients in poverty, and to account for the impact of communication patterns upon diagnosis and treatment.

The other alternative is that social welfare policy sequences might be reorganized to include in their philosophical content the values and philosophical postures of black power advocates, the strain of oriental communities in the welfare system toward self sufficiency, the development of community services in the ghettos, the relationship of ethnically oriented welfare organizations to the total welfare system, the contribution of ethnic and racially oriented organizations to the groups they serve, and historical perspectives on welfare which include those primarily concerned with minorities. For example, analysis of national social policy with respect to the American Indian helps the student to understand the latter's current isolated and alienated condition. And although an astute analysis of its structure and function would afford many insights into the antecedents of the current war on poverty the Freedman's Bureau, America's first war on poverty is almost never mentioned in the social work curriculum. The enlargement of content in this sequence to include the aforementioned areas would provide the student with a wholeness in his knowledge base.

Similarly the student's knowledge of the current welfare system and of the need for income maintenance programs can be broadened by an in-depth analysis of the economic condition of racial and ethnic minorities.

The research sequence should be expanded to include inquiry into selected topics on socio-ethnic systems and social work practice. It should serve to integrate knowledge about these systems with practice, affording the student the opportunity to become familiar with the basic design of research and its outcomes in areas of inter-group and intro-group relations.

Field instruction should be expanded to include broader learning in ethnic communities, and in newly developed interventive modalities which are useful to the people being served.

3. The Humanizing Function. The objective here is to assist the students to overcome racist attitudes by imparting new knowledge and new values. Because racism has not been squarely dealt with, because we have avoided acknowledging its pervasiveness, we have rarely included any content on the subject in the social work curricula. The Kerner Report is clear and unequivocal about the extent of racism in our society, and in preparing students to participate in the struggle for justice, they need a full understanding of racism which includes an examination of theories and principles of action regarding the nature of prejudice, institutional racism, and minority group reaction to it.[8] The knowledge gained from this content should afford the

student a more realistic understanding of the nature of our society and the nature of man, and should provide a framework for an understanding of his own attitudes and feelings about race.

4. Reconciliation Function. The objective here is to include in the curriculum the substantive content that will afford an objective analysis and understanding of issues, during the process of which, it is anticipated that a new spirit of cooperation between non-whites and whites will be achieved. This content will include a review of the liberal position in respect to civil rights which includes a critical analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, the implications of the attack on minorities by populists, the severly threatened, insecure position of the white working class, conservative theories in respect to balance and consensus. It is expected that this content will help the student to gain realistic, non-cynical, and empathetic insights which will form the basis for positive cooperative effort.

5. The Psychological Function. For the non-white student, the introduction of positive content about him and his group will be psychologically uplifting, in that it will assist him to develop a sense of pride, awareness, and confidence in his capacity to strive and endure. He becomes cognitively and affectively better prepared to deal with the struggle to obtain mastery over his life, to seek power to accomplish group goals, and to take courage to move toward a reorganization of human services and the professions to make them accountable to those whom they serve.

6. The Ideological Function. The purpose of this curriculum content is to serve as a means of developing new ideological orientations, to develop new theories and strategies for changing societies. The ideological basis and subsequent strategies and action plans re: nonviolence, separatism, conflict, integration, judicial redress, and revolution are examined. A new analysis is made of the American image and the values implicit in them. The student comes away with a better understanding of the spirit of reform, and the necessary responsibilities attendant upon it; with a new understanding of their potential and, hopefully with some preparation for the long, difficult, unpopular and sometimes dangerous tasks ahead.

In organizing curriculum around these functions, different structural models may be used. The diffusive model is one in which content about minorities is spread through all components of the curriculum, for difference, diversity, and variations among people is deemed necessary throughout the sequence of study. Other educators advocate a more centralized structural arrangement in which separate courses containing substantive material about racial minorities and racism are essential. It is thought that incorporation of the content throughout the curriculum will not be sufficient, it will not receive the in-depth study that it requires, and that it will become a non-significant part of the curriculum, as the overall orientation is to the majority. The diffuse model allows a teacher to place emphasis on minority content on a very individualistic basis, which may mean it will not be adequate to what is required.

Lastly, a more wholistic approach is the structural arrangement that includes both the above - the development of special courses, using interdisciplinary faculty plus reinforcement throughout the curriculum.

A discussion of this type of curriculum innovation would be incomplete without some attention to the educational process itself. In such a process, an essential ingredient is the teacher -- a responsible agent who controls the process of learning, fashioning his teaching manner after the purpose of education, and in the teaching situation, he transforms the general purposes of education into precise objectives of instruction. Thus, it is incumbent upon him to understand the minority learning, to bridge the gap of social distance between himself and his students through warm concern, commitment, a non-patronizing attitude, and continuous, sustained efforts to individualize the students. Increased effort must be made to acquire the services of minority group teachers at every professional rank and level of responsibility to serve as role models whose presence encourages the students and reduces anxiety.

A second factor is the student himself who is the central figure, for his activity, his learning, his understanding are the objectives of the process. His activity is crucial not only to success, but to the definition of the process. The minority student's different qualifications, his different approach to problem-solving, his different ways of knowing, all enrich the educational process. Interaction of non-white students with white students is promoted because in their exchanges they teach and enlighten each other. Their communications are signals of fellowship, not

noblesse oblige.

The last element is the material studied and the interactions about it. The material consists of structured segments of knowledge, and has implications for learning which are dynamic. Ideas about minority groups that are thought provoking, which lend themselves to retrospection with introspection on the part of the student and teacher are more productive than guilt inducing verbal and intellectual flagellation, which have limited lasting effectiveness.

In conclusion, I have briefly commented upon the nature of our changing times, and on the social revolution which bears promise of bringing all of us into a higher level of living if we can solve our human relations problems. If we ask how the greatest social change of our age is being brought about, in terms of the decolonization of American poor and the civil rights movement in the U.S., it is hard to attribute much of it to whites whose leaders, despite one hundred years of superior education, failed to initiate any kind of solution. We all have a stake in bringing about these changes. They are as vital to the well-being of the majority as to the minority. The problem of racism in America has been exposed and must be resolved. A profession such as ours must clearly reorient itself in its goals and practice. We have developed sophistication in therapeutic procedures, and we must now develop the same degree of expertise and commitment in social action geared to structural changes in our society. As a necessary prerequisite, the social work curriculum must prepare students to understand and appreciate racial and ethnic differences, to understand how these factors have influenced social institutions

and their policies, and develop knowledge, attitudes, and skills in social change.

Content about ethnic minorities should permeate all sequences in the curriculum. This can be accomplished both by incorporating it into established courses and by offering very specific courses that deal with minority-group concerns. Such an approach broadens the basis of social work education and prepares professionals to participate in the most compelling social roles of our times.

We believe in our country, in its capacity to create the kind of society in which men can be free and equal, and we believe that our professional education can be designed to prepare students to diminish ethnic and racial prejudice, to reorder the socio-political structure of society so that it provides for human realization.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Clarke, Kenneth, "Black and White - The Ghetto Inside," in Racism, A Casebook, Lapedes & Burrows (eds.), N.Y.: Crowell Co., 1971, pp. 104-116.

[2]Hersch, Seymour, My Lai 4, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1970.

[3]Joyce, Frank, An Analysis of American Racism. Unpublished paper, p. 1.

[4]Robertson, Mary Ella, "Inclusion of Content on Ethnic Minorities in the Social Work Curriculum," in Ethnic Minorities in Social Work Education. C. Scott (ed.), N.Y.: CSWE, pp. 70-72.

[5]Culture is defined here as patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

[6]This is an adaptation of the Black studies model formulated by Dr. Charles Hamilton. See Hamilton, "Challenge of Black Studies" in Social Policy. Volume 1, No. 2, August 1970, pp. 14-16.

[7]Hendry, Charles, Social Workers: Catalysts in a Changing Society. Buffalo, New York: University of Buffalo, 1962, pp. 2-3.

[8]New York Times, "Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders," New York: Dutton Press, 1968.